



FACT SHEET

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DARIEN COMMUNITIES STRENGTHENED

This program supports effective governance, community institution building, small-scale social and productive infrastructure, and income-generating opportunities. Focus of activities is on helping select communities implement social infrastructure projects identified by the communities with an emphasis on local management, self-help, and sustainability. Projects are undertaken as a result of community consensus-building and in partnership with the community. Building on community consensus regarding productive infrastructure priorities and income-generating activities, projects are developed in partnership with local authorities, private sector, NGOs, community organizations and other stakeholders.

In FY 2005, USAID assistance continued to make a significant contribution to improve the quality of life and well-being of 64 participating communities in the Darien region. Program results represented milestone achievements given the geographic remoteness of the Darien and large number of isolated communities that benefited from social and productive infrastructure. In the select communities, the program helped:

- Enhance awareness of the key role that local government plays in improving access to essential services
- Communities speak with one voice to articulate priority needs and areas for targeting greater public sector investment
- Further strengthened the capacity of the indigenous population in community development
- Beneficiaries become capable of identifying development constraints and opportunities, as well as organizing themselves into production groups for carrying out development projects.

Major Accomplishments:

- A group of 20 indigenous women in the community of Nicanor in the Darien Province is experiencing for the first time economic empowerment. They are pursuing self-help economic activities to increase their household incomes. These activities helped the women organize into production groups and operate a micro-enterprise that adds value to their local harvests. Corn is milled into flour and blended with dried bean, and the nutritionally fortified product is marketed locally.
- A circuit, Paradise Trail in Darien, has been integrated into the National Tourism Plan by the Panamanian Tourism Institute. Seven communities are now poised to benefit from the tourism circuit. Promotional brochures and fliers were distributed to the Chamber of Tourism, the Association of Travel Agents and Tourism, COPA Airlines, local hotels, and travel agencies and operators. Tour operators have organized tourist trips into the area and are selling package tours to the Darien.
- Sustainable community-based forestry planning and management is in place with the participation of indigenous leaders, forest-based industries, and the National Environmental Authority. The Plan covers 26,720 hectares situated within the indigenous reservation of Cemaco along the Tupisa River, and is under the management of five communities.
- Two local governments and local communities organized a round table that sought the support of other donors in promoting eco-tourism. As a result, the Inter-American Development Bank made available \$60,000 to two municipalities, Chepigana and Pinogana, to promote tourism.
- Twenty small aqueduct systems were installed and five farm-to-market roads rehabilitated. Also, ten income generating projects became fully operational.
- The National Environmental Authority, the private sector, and several Government of Panama administrative entities are working on the revision of the existing national Forestry Law. Changes to the law will permit communities with demonstrated experience in sustainable forestry management to take on management of more than the currently permitted 1,000 hectare-limit per community.